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The rationale for a wider concept of inclusive education for teacher education: A case study of Serbia

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Abstract Teacher education for inclusive education (IE) is recognized as vital for improving quality and equity in education globally. In the Western Balkan countries it is also part of the transition process towards joining the European Union and has attracted international funding for IE-related projects. A key finding from research funded by the European Training Foundation, carried out by the authors as members of a seven-country research team in 2009–2010, was that the prevailing local understanding of IE was very narrow. In this article we hypothesize the reasons for this finding. We use a case study of school and teacher education systems in Serbia to explore how this understanding has constrained the development of IE and associated teacher education and limited the efficacy of some recent internationally supported developments. We identify both challenges and possible ways forward for teacher education for IE based on promoting a concept of IE that is both collaboratively agreed and comprehensive.

Keywords Teacher education · Competence · Inclusive Education · Diversity · Western Balkans · Serbia

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Global educational reforms, including those in the European Union (EU) and Western Balkan countries, have embraced Inclusive Education (IE) as one of their systemic foci, despite its varied conceptualization (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2010, pp. 4, 7). Change processes in education in general are frequently complex, even chaotic, driven by stakeholders learning by trial and error as they adopt “new ways” (Fullan 1993). This is also true of the development of IE. The related development of teacher education is fundamental to successful change, provided there is, amongst other prerequisites, a relevant information baseline.

The regional study

In 2009, to establish such a baseline for seven countries, the European Training Foundation (ETF) commissioned a regional research study, called *Mapping Policies and Practices for the Preparation of Teachers for Inclusive Education in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity in the Western Balkans*. The seven countries were Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. We refer to the country reports and to their synthesis report as regional report (Pantić, Closs, and Ivošević 2010). As we describe below, this qualitative study explored the perceptions that relevant stakeholders hold about the current contexts and practices of IE and related teacher education, both pre-service and continuing professional development (CPD).

A major finding among the 28 issues identified in the regional report was that views in the seven country reports reflected a narrow conceptualization of IE primarily as inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) and, sometimes, Roma children. Reasons for this are explored later. The narrow conceptualization contrasts with the broader understanding of IE implied by Florian and Rouse (2009) and other writers, and by relevant European documents (European Commission 2005, 2008). For example, Acedo (2008, p. 5) writes of a “guiding principle helping to accomplish quality Education for All (EFA)—education systems that benefit from diversity, aiming to build a more just, democratic society”.

The sociocultural and educational context of the study

The EU policies on social and cultural inclusion emphasize the increasing linguistic, cultural, and attainment diversity of school populations common to many EU countries (OECD 2010). Its legislative *acquis*, the common rights and duties that bind EU member states together, emphasizes efforts to reduce discrimination and promote equal opportunities. This has implications for education in the already very diverse Western Balkan countries, including Serbia, the subject of this article’s case study. The region faces multiple other challenges for inclusive education relating to extreme poverty, children with severe special educational needs who have never attended school, Roma children (some still itinerant), isolated rural communities and overcrowded conurbations, and other disadvantaged groups such as populations that have been internally displaced and are returning after the conflicts of the 1990s.

In the ETF study we hypothesized that the narrow understanding of IE we found could be related to several traditions in education: children with SEN were usually educated in special schools, if at all; Roma children’s non-enrolment, absences, and early

school-leaving were readily accepted; and the separate pre-service training for professionals working in the special school sector was not questioned. The funding priorities of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), especially in their emergency work during the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, targeted Roma children and children with SEN separately, perceiving them as particularly vulnerable; however, in doing so they initially reinforced “difference” rather than commonality in their activities.

The educator-therapists who work in special schools receive their professional education in separate faculties, previously called faculties of “defectology”; this arrangement recognizes “differences” in children with SEN mainly in terms of “defects” that require remedial treatment. This has sometimes led to neglect of their holistic development and education, segregation in special institutions, and separation from families and peers. In the historically diverse Western Balkans, mainstream school classroom practices adopted whole-class undifferentiated approaches to deliver the lockstep national curriculum as though pupils were a homogenous body, a nod—perhaps—to socialist ideals of equality and unity. Pupil diversity was not addressed in teacher education and mainstream schools; therefore teachers were never equipped with the knowledge, strategies, and tools to address differences at all, far less to address them inclusively.

Much of the current preparation and development of teachers for inclusion appears to have borrowed from the tradition of “defectology”. It has often focused more on what is “wrong” with the groups now to be included and how they may be “remediated” to fit into mainstream schools, than on looking to systemic and whole-school approaches such as anti-discrimination practices and working in appropriately differentiated, constructive, and supportive ways with *all* learners. Many children already present in schools have unrecognized and therefore unaddressed difficulties in benefiting from the education generally on offer.

Research methodology

This article draws on the data and findings from the two-phase ETF study. In each country, Phase 1 of the study involved desk research: analysis of legislation, and of national and international guidance, policy, and other informative documents. We also gathered data about CPD. This was followed by field research and the writing of a country report. The field research consisted of semi-structured interviews to access in-depth responses (Silverman 2005, p. 111) of a range of actors: key policy-makers at national and local levels, teacher educators, school-based staff (head teachers, expert advisers, and both novice and experienced teachers), and community representatives and parents (including those from minority and potentially disadvantaged groups). A purposeful sampling approach was used to select respondents with a view to identifying well-informed individuals from relevant stakeholder groups and to ensuring a variety of perspectives (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 29). Further data relevant to pre-service teacher education programmes was gathered from teacher educators, teachers, and student teachers, using an open access e-questionnaire.

Phase 2 of the study involved the writing of a synthesis report based on thematic analysis (Ritchie and Spencer 1994) of the seven country reports to identify key issues. The 28 issues, common to many, but not always all, of the seven countries, were then illustrated from the country reports and discussed in the light of literature and research on IE from the Western Balkans, the EU, and wider international sources. Suggestions were made to help address the 28 issues identified.

Case study approach

Individual case studies provide opportunities to develop more detailed understanding of a single example from a wider range of others (Silverman 2005, p. 126). Country case studies may also be used to illuminate issues and allow readers from other countries to compare aspects parallel to their own situation. We selected Serbia for the case study because of our more recent knowledge of the country and because its new pro-IE legislation (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia [NARS] 2009), and supportive World Bank funding for its implementation, made progress towards IE a reasonable expectation. We also focus on the first issue identified in the thematic analysis of the country reports (the narrow conceptualization of IE) as the most overriding and pervasive, impacting on and amplifying the other 27 issues identified (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 24).

We therefore draw on the Serbia Country Report (Macura-Milovanović, Gera, and Kovačević 2010) and the Regional Report (Pantić et al. 2010). To gather the Serbian data, interviews were conducted with 8 school principals and school psychologists, 5 teacher educators, 8 higher-level policy makers, 5 representatives of NGOs, and 5 in-service teacher trainers. Two focus groups with parents and community representatives were conducted in Belgrade (each with 10 participants) and one group in Novi Sad (with 6 participants). Focus groups with teachers were conducted in three locations: (1) a pro-inclusion city centre school in Novi Sad, with classes taught in both Serbian and Hungarian (8 participants); (2) a large urban school in Belgrade with 1,700 students in the first four grades, including 10 Roma students from a local deprived settlement (16 participants); and (3) a small school in Rušanj, a rural suburb of Belgrade, with 200 students, of whom 40% are settled Roma (12 participants). Two focus groups with local authorities were held in Belgrade (with 7 and 8 participants) and one in Novi Sad (7 participants). Further information was collected through the e-survey from 27 teachers, 4 teacher educators, and 4 student teachers.

We also include some verifiable recent information, relevant to IE development and accessed after the ETF research was completed. This more recent data enriches the case study and illustrates the rapid, but not smooth, change that is still ongoing as we write this article.

Concepts of “inclusive education” and “teacher competence”

Before discussing the issues and challenges in preparing teachers for IE in Serbia we provide the definitions we use of the two concepts central to the ETF research and our article.

Inclusive education

Inclusive education is a variously defined concept. For the purpose of this article we contrast the *narrow* understanding of IE identified in the region and the *broader* concept adopted in our study. A narrow concept might, for example, use IE as a term covering the attempt to educate persons with disabilities by integrating them optimally into the regular structures of the educational system (Michailakis and Reich 2009) or to bring together in one school children of two previously separated ethnic groups (Čorkalo-Biruški and Ajduković 2008). Our conceptualization is broad to accommodate the wide diversity of the

Western Balkans but also to address the ethical principle that *all* children have the right to education. In the ETF study we describe it as

[...] a process by which schools attempt to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering and restructuring curriculum organization and provision, and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity. This process enables schools to increase their capacity to accept all those pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces all forms of exclusion and degradation of students on the basis of disability, ethnicity, or anything that could render the school life of some children unnecessarily difficult. (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 23)

Consequently, inclusion should become a generalized mainstream educational policy and practice, not limited to specific interventions addressing one or more particular disadvantaged group/s.

Teacher competence

The Western Balkan countries often look to the EU as they reform their teacher education policies. The key document, *Common European Principles for Teachers' Competencies and Qualifications*, suggests that “teachers should be able to respond to the needs of individual learners in an inclusive way” and that their education should ensure “an understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of education” (European Commission 2005, p. 2). The importance of teachers and their development is stressed in *Improving Competences for the 21st Century*:

It is seen as essential that those who enter the profession are supported in developing a deeper understanding of the historical, social and cultural contexts within which they work. Teacher education also needs to present teaching as a problem-solving or research-in-action activity during which teaching methods and strategies, formal or informal, are examined in relation to the children's learning [...] (European Commission 2008, p. 5)

The emphasis on teachers being reflexive and able to contextualize their teaching entails substantial change and an expansion of teachers' roles, requiring career-long development and support.

The concept of competence is usually defined as an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (attitudes) (Pantić and Wubbels 2010; Stoof, Martens, van Merriënboer, and Bastiaens 2002; Tigelaar, Dolmans, Wolfhagen, and Van Der Vleuten 2004). Teacher competence for IE in its broader conceptualization implies broad knowledge and generic skills relevant to the improvement of teaching and learning for all, including the capacity to reduce barriers to learning and participation. This involves understanding the sociocultural factors that produce individual differences, being aware of educational and social issues that affect students' learning, and using multifaceted approaches that take account of students' individual characteristics, of their interests and their learning from outside school, and of their previous knowledge and individual and cultural experiences (Florian and Rouse 2009). It therefore requires much broader knowledge than that about disability and learning difficulties. A diet solely of multiple “specific” trainings would be inefficient, leaving gaps and creating overlaps.

The most critical element of teacher competence for IE is dispositions, defined as tendencies for an individual to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs (Villegas 2007). They involve teacher beliefs about the purposes of

education, knowledge, learning, and the educability of their students. Teacher beliefs form the basis of teacher expectations of their students, which lead them to treat students differently; as a result, students' performance, aspirations, and self-image may be aligned to teachers' expectations rather than to students' abilities (Villegas 2007). For IE to be effective, therefore, teacher dispositions need to be prejudice-free, equitable, and all-embracing.

Teacher preparation and development in Serbia

We now outline the education system in Serbia, and the systems of pre-service and in-service teacher education, before identifying some of their problematic issues.

The structure of the education system

Serbia's education system operates at four levels. First, kindergarten enrolls children from age 3 until they enter compulsory primary school at age 6.5/7.5; the final year of kindergarten is required. Compulsory primary education lasts eight years (or up to ten years if children repeat grades) and has two cycles: grades 1–4 (mainly with one teacher), and grades 5–8 (courses/subjects with different teachers). There are three types of secondary schools: four-year general secondary (gymnasias), four-year vocational school with both university and employment tracks, and three-year vocational school for employment only. The higher education institutions include universities, art colleges, academies of applied sciences, and vocational education colleges. There are also some special schools and classes but many eligible children are still not enrolled (Čolin and Marković 2004).

Pre-service teacher education system

The preparation that teachers receive varies according to the level (pre-primary, primary, secondary) and type of school (mainstream or special) at which they are to be employed. Preschool teachers are educated at vocational colleges of higher education (three years) or at teacher education faculties (four years, or five for a master's) or at faculties of education (three years or five for a master's). Primary class teachers (for grades 1 to 4) attend one of five teacher education institutions (four years for a diploma, followed by one year for a master's). Doctoral-level courses at teacher education faculties are provided only in subject didactics, not in education sciences. However, teachers may continue their master's or doctoral studies at the Department for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, within the field of Pedagogy. The Law on Higher Education (NARS 2005) introduced the accreditation of institutions and programmes for studies at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels. (In the next section we describe the pre-service education of special school educator-therapists.)

The basic studies curriculum, with a narrow disciplinary focus, varies at different faculties. Subject teachers for mainstream and special schools are educated at faculties for the relevant academic discipline. Teaching practice is not generally required; where it is, it does not exceed 2% to 3% of the total instruction time. Subject didactics (course units addressing pedagogical content knowledge) are usually offered towards the end of programmes, separate from education sciences (Kovács-Cerović 2006). Teachers of vocational subjects are professionals who have graduated from faculties that offer training in their basic vocation (e.g., medicine, law, engineering, economics, etc.) and do not offer courses that are generally considered prerequisites for teaching (e.g., subject didactics, pedagogy, and psychology).

Teacher CPD system

Continuing professional development or CPD, usually in the form of in-service training (INSET) courses, has been obligatory since 2003. The *Rulebook for Teacher Professional Development* (MoE 2005) specifies that teachers must complete at least 100 hours over five years of public tender-based accredited INSET programmes from the catalogue of the Institute for the Improvement of Education (IIE). Of these, up to 40 hours are elective, and the remaining 60, or more, come from listed required programmes. The teachers choose courses based on their interests and professional development plans, while the school principal and governing board prioritize requests and secure funding for the school's priority areas (Kovács-Cerović 2006, p. 510).

Problems in teacher preparation for IE

We now draw on the Serbia country report and the regional reports (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010; Pantić et al. 2010) to note some key problematic issues in education and in developing teachers to work inclusively.

Fragmentation of teacher education

Multiple fracture lines exist in the education of teachers and other school staff:

- As noted, teacher education for different levels of education is delivered in different programmes by different higher education institutions that pay different amounts of attention to teacher education. Subject teachers, especially in vocational education, are provided with limited or no teacher education.
- Collaboration between faculties of education and faculties that educate subject teachers is hindered by long-established faculty autonomy within universities and single-discipline programmes.
- No links exist between the faculties that prepare teachers and those that prepare other mainstream education professionals—pedagogues (school-based educational advisors), psychologists, and speech therapists are educated at relevant faculties or departments for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Psychology, and Special Education and Rehabilitation (previously Defectology). The latter faculties offer four-year programs that prepare speech therapists and educator-therapists who will work in special schools; at present they are not qualified for mainstream teaching.
- The pre-service and in-service teacher education systems are not connected, and little apparent effort has been made to link them coherently.

This fragmentation hinders collaboration in general, and has a negative impact on mutual understanding of educational concepts and aims, including those of IE. Such an understanding could lead to a more holistic approach to preparing teachers for inclusive practices and to collaboration in promoting inclusive approaches among key actors—teachers, principals, and other education professionals.

Inadequate practical preparation for inclusive teaching

Overall, the initial education that would prepare teachers to work inclusively is neither adequate nor sufficient. Research shows that some teachers have explicitly negative

attitudes towards including pupils with SEN in mainstream schools and feel poorly prepared to do so (Pavlović 2011; Rajović 2009). Rajović (2009) wrote that “teachers are not prepared enough to educate children with disabilities”, nor to teach “in inclusive settings” (p. 101). Another study found that, overall, teachers held slightly negative attitudes towards including children with SEN, but those who had experience teaching such children had more positive attitudes towards inclusion than teachers without it (Kalyva, Gojkovic, and Tsakiris 2007). Similar results were also found in other studies (Sretenov 2000).

It is significant that even these authors tended to perceive “inclusion” as linked to children with SEN, a narrower conceptualization of IE. They see the way to improve IE in terms of more practice and greater understanding in working with children with SEN; indeed, this approach is helpful and is also recommended in Croatia (Batarello-Kokić, Vukelić, and Ljubić 2010, p. 45). However, children with SEN, important as they are, are only part of a much wider population of children who are disadvantaged in mainstream education. *All* pupils would benefit from their teachers experiencing wide diversity, in and out of schools, during their professional education. The regional report also recommended recruiting student teachers from more varied backgrounds (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 53).

Pre-service teacher education institutions focus on instilling disciplinary knowledge, rather than on building skills and competences. Both Pavlović (2011) and Stanković (2011) found that teachers consider themselves to be ill-prepared, and point to insufficiently reformed initial teacher education, among other factors. The content and methods of programmes are generally outdated and ineffective in promoting inclusive practices in education (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 45). Although curricula currently lack the elements most relevant for IE, they do contain some subjects intended for future teachers working with students with SEN. These are mostly based on the “medical model”, as in the programmes on defectology (special education and rehabilitation). For example, a course called *Methods for Special Work with Students with Minor Developmental Disabilities* aims to “introduce students to the legalities of the development and rehabilitation of persons with various levels of developmental disabilities, to help them acquire a basic knowledge of defectology” (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 47). An INSET teacher educator in the ETF study expressed her anger at such courses:

[...] teaching someone to segregate and discriminate against someone else, this is violence. There should be no special subjects, because from the very beginning, because of their title, these subjects make student teachers differentiate between students, segregate them and discriminate against them. (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 50)

Student teachers also criticized the way that “special” subjects are taught. One said she only learned about “the classification of disabilities and how to diagnose them [...] rather than how these students should actually be dealt with” (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 46). This frustration is also reported in Croatia, where, typically, “classes focus on disability and are not taught in a way that focuses on differentiated instruction” (Batarello-Kokić et al. 2010, p. 45). In fact, the faculties that prepare subject teachers fail to provide courses that offer elementary knowledge of teaching and child development and most courses have little or no IE content.

Thus, either inadvertently or deliberately, pre-service teacher education fails to promote the absolute duty of *all* teachers to teach *all* children in *all* their classes optimally.

Segregated preparation of professionals for students with SEN

Another barrier to teachers' understanding of IE, which also has its roots in the tradition of fragmented teacher education, is Serbia's special segregated provision for children with SEN. Most special school pupils have mild to moderate SEN; the schools also include—inappropriately—some non-disabled Roma children who live in extreme socio-economic disadvantage. Some confusion arises from this provision, including an underlying assumption, especially among mainstream school teachers, that special school staff have specific expertise, based not just on their experience but also on their four years of specialist study, described earlier. Accordingly, many mainstream teachers genuinely believe that they themselves cannot undertake any work with students with SEN, and that special provision is the best option for children with SEN and sometimes for Roma students, because of “specialist” staff, smaller class sizes, and a supposedly high level of individualization (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 90).

An illustration of such beliefs is this statement by a teacher: “Inclusion must be based on the voluntary principle, it is not right that someone ‘gives you’ a child with special needs, and you have to work with them; if it were so simple, studies in the Faculty of Defectology would not last for four years [...]” (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 39). Moreover, Pavlović (2011) found that teachers accepted responsibility only for the “average student”; they thought that those with developmental difficulties should be in the care of specialist professionals, such as educator-therapists and doctors. Such attitudes deny some children their educational rights and reject the idea that competence in IE is integral to all teachers' professionalism.

We recognize the importance of the additional knowledge and skills needed by some teachers and their pupils, especially where children have significant communication needs that must be met through such accommodations as Braille, alternative and augmentative communication, deaf sign language, and efforts to support the transition from home language to the language of instruction. However, a review of quality research into teacher education for working with children with SEN (Lewis and Norwich 2005) showed that when teachers receive high quality, holistically oriented pre-service education and have experience in inclusive schools, they need considerably less subsequent specialist CPD or advice from specialists than is commonly assumed.

Lack of coherence in quality assurance frameworks for teacher education

Moreover, the criteria used for accrediting pre-service teacher education programmes fail to address changes in education. For example, programmes are not evaluated on their capacity to empower future teachers to work effectively in contexts of social and cultural diversity, nor do their learning outcomes correspond with the teacher competences identified as useful for IE.

In Serbia, as elsewhere in the Western Balkans, the accreditation of CPD INSET programmes is not linked to evaluations of the impact that such training will have on the development of teacher competence, as measured by change in teacher practices and in pupil learning outcomes (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 114). Serbian INSET programmes are accredited by the IIE, which evaluates programmes against established criteria; however, the provider is not obliged to follow up and determine whether or not the knowledge and skills taught are actually implemented (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 52). Teachers often do not implement what they are supposed to have learned about IE, at a level that is problematic in Serbia and elsewhere. This was noted, for example, in the ETF studies in

Montenegro (Milić, Marić, Bosković, and Šćepović 2010, p. 56) and in Kosovo (Rexhaj, Mula, and Hima 2010, p. 45), although whole-school approaches to CPD in IE with engaged school principals ensured better outcomes (Rexhaj et al. 2010, p. 46). Courses in aspects of IE are popular, but some INSET that is ostensibly on IE may actually promote a “medical model” of “remediating” SEN rather than promoting the more useful competences for working with *all* pupils, e.g., differentiated strategies for teaching, group work, and peer support. Stanković (2011) also found that teachers’ choices of INSET courses were often driven more by their efforts to fulfil their obligatory hours than by their concern to seek quality or efficiency.

Recent major pro-IE developments in Serbia

Pro-IE and teacher education reforms that promote IE and related approaches rely extensively on international loans, donations, and the projects of INGOs, significant contributors to changing practices. INGOs and NGOs have promoted and supported numerous programmes and projects, carried out in cooperation with the Serbian Ministry of Education (MoE 2009). Here we present a non-exhaustive selection of those that best illustrate how international assistance, with its underlying conceptualizations of IE, has addressed some of the problems identified in relation to teacher preparation for IE.

A number of projects aim to equip teachers for IE with the necessary attitudes, skills, knowledge, and motivation. We explore how the different conceptualizations of IE underlying different international projects and their teacher preparation for IE interact with existing traditions, and the effects that this interaction has on changing practices. We also offer some critiques of these overall positive developments.

New legislative framework for IE

The recent policies of IE in Serbia are largely based on the Law on the Foundations of the Education System or LoF (NARS 2009). Its implementation is supported by various projects financed by the MoE, but is also reliant on joint funding through a World Bank loan, used in part to support the Delivery of Integrated Local Services (DILS) mega-project described below. The legislation, *inter alia*, promotes equity and educational justice, social inclusion, the protection of human rights, and non-discrimination.

The LoF defines inclusion as *a principle*, introducing the right to all levels of education in the regular system without discrimination or segregation for students from marginalized and vulnerable social groups and for those with “developmental difficulties and disabilities” (Article 6). Not surprisingly, it highlights the rights of particular groups that have long been excluded, discriminated against, and even victimized, although its overall intent is based on a comprehensive concept. Article 77 introduces Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in support of IE. These may be created for students with exceptional abilities, social vulnerability, or mental or physical disabilities or those who, for other significant reasons, require additional support in education. An IEP includes, *inter alia*, any necessary individualized approaches tailored to meet specific individual needs. Under Article 117, schools may also employ pedagogical assistants (PAs) to provide advice and additional educational support to students, and to cooperate with parents and with relevant institutions, organizations, associations, and local authorities.

While they are intended to affirm IE, the measures supporting “recognisably special” individuals could, if not handled appropriately, result in exclusion: students who have IEPs

or receive support from PAs could become *de facto* isolated or stigmatized, even within a mainstream class, because their “difference” is inadvertently highlighted. For example, in the ETF study, the Macedonia country report described how children sent for support to school pedagogues or to school psychologists were subsequently victimized by their peers (Spasovski, Ballazhi, and Friedman 2010, p. 40). Plainly, pre-service and CPD education could help teachers to grasp a wider concept of IE, and to gain the positive dispositions and sufficient knowledge and understanding they need to accurately identify the real difficulties students have in learning, along with generically useful inclusive teaching approaches to IE for *all* pupils in their classes. Such training might help teachers, PAs, and schools to be effectively and discreetly inclusive and to use IEPs and PAs to enhance children’s full participation. Current doubts about this possibility are illustrated in a recent unpublished UNICEF evaluation study carried out early in the implementation of IE in Serbia; the study warns that inappropriate use of IEPs with Roma children could reinforce negative stereotypes of their low potential, rather than optimize their learning and inclusion.

The LoF recognizes the critical importance of teacher education for IE in its provisions relating to CPD for school staff, prioritizing it for three years (Article 129), and requiring all school boards to draw up plans for the CPD of their teachers. It also (Article 38) enables local communities to establish centres for teacher professional development, and stipulates that teachers not participating in CPD may have their licenses suspended (Article 127).

The conceptualization of IE underlying the MoE’s CPD priorities seems to combine both narrower and broader concepts. The narrow concept of IE is reflected in the naming of special groups of students and the labelling of courses for teachers for working with them, notably children with SEN and Roma, even though the content of such courses is often much more widely applicable. At the same time other courses, e.g., in anti-discriminatory practices and innovative methods of instruction and class management, indicate a broader conceptualization and more relevant approaches to teacher education for IE.

The LoF also stipulates that, starting in the 2012–2013 school year, all newly employed teachers must have undertaken psychological, pedagogical, and methodological studies in an institute of higher education and must gain 30 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits during their studies or after graduation, with six points of work experience in a school (Article 8). This should rectify the situation described earlier, in which engineers and doctors teach in vocational or other secondary schools without any preparation in psychology, pedagogy, or subject didactics. However, they could contribute more effectively to IE if that mandatory preparation and subsequent CPD were to assume a broad concept of IE, and were to offer appropriate methods of teaching subject matter that would prepare them to respond to the diversity in their pupils.

The DILS project

One of the most comprehensive projects supporting, *inter alia*, the development of inclusive educational practices, is the World Bank loan-supported DILS project that includes numerous substantial sub-projects. A sum of €4.9M has been allocated to educational institutions that submit approved development projects and innovations aimed at increasing the quality and equity of education in line with the new legislation. All primary and secondary schools and preschool institutions may submit proposals during the period 2010 to 2012; 800 institutions are likely to receive funding for their projects (MoE 2009). All Serbian primary and secondary schools have sent teams of representatives for inclusion; these teams consist of a school principal, school psychologist, and school pedagogue,

along with one subject teacher and one class teacher. Each team has received two days of INSET on inclusive education policies and IEPs (MoES 2011).

Since the DILS project is designed to support the implementation of the LoF we can assume that it shares both its narrow and its broad concepts of IE. That is, it focuses on particular groups that the legislation specifies as vulnerable but also on whole-school development for IE, as in, e.g., the requirement that schools create their own development plans and that school teams take INSET courses and then pass that knowledge on to their colleagues. However, although it is economically pragmatic, this “cascade” dissemination of INSET to colleagues can be less effective than direct education (Hayes 2000), not least because school teams lack training experience.

Projects focussed on the education of vulnerable groups

A plethora of projects has significantly shaped change towards IE with their focus on the inclusion of children/students from long-marginalized groups; they mostly target improved education for Roma and children with SEN. Such projects often involve teacher education. For example, within the MoE project called the Common Action Plan for the Advancement of Roma Education in Serbia, teachers will receive INSET to improve their competences for teaching children from vulnerable groups, as did those participating in the Save the Children-UK project, Mitigating the Impact of Poverty on Children with Disabilities in Serbia. It was, however, not clear from the relevant INSET plans whether the suggested approaches, which are in fact widely applicable beyond the target groups, were promoted only in relation to the specific groups, or whether teachers were shown the more generic applications of the INSET. Without such direction, broader learning and transfer on the part of teachers cannot be assumed. Despite Croatia's longer history of IE, the Croatia country report also noted similar concerns about the absence of useful generalization from narrowly focussed topics in pre-service education (Batarello-Kokić et al. 2010, p. 44).

Projects introducing Roma teaching assistants (RTA), largely with support from the Fund for an Open Society, started in 1996, based on the “Step by Step” methodology. A project begun in 2006, Support to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights for Coordination Programmes for Roma, initiated by the MoE and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission, specifically aimed at introducing RTA into primary school education. The latest project, begun in 2010 using €1.8M from the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds in partnership with the MoE, is titled Education for All: Increasing Availability and Quality of Education for Children from Marginalized Groups. It includes teacher education and places 80 PAs (previously RTAs) in schools and 48 PAs in preschool institutions to assist school/institution teams working with children from marginalized groups.

The assistants seem to have had an impact on some teachers' perceptions of their own responsibilities, however. A recent evaluation study by the Institute for the Evaluation of Education Quality (IEEQ 2009) indicated that teachers did not understand the role of RTAs/PAs and did not engage in collaborative classroom teamwork with them. The lack of relevant education on how teachers and assistants can collaborate was also noted in the Croatia country report (Batarello-Kokić et al. 2010, p. 38). It seems that many teachers see the inclusion of Roma students as an additional burden that is commonly neglected, and that teachers now see it primarily as the RTAs' responsibility. These results indicate that although the role of the RTAs and PAs was invaluable and successful (about 91% of Roma students improved their school achievements once Roma assistants were introduced), the introduction of RTAs and PAs also provides license for teachers to continue to neglect

Roma pupils, allowing the RTAs to actually teach those pupils, contrary to their officially more limited supportive role. Thus teachers continue to fail in their duty to teach *all* the children in their class.

Projects addressing teacher development within school development and evaluation

Other projects address teacher development for IE through their support for quality assurance at the school level. The MoE and the British Council (2005) collaborated in developing the *Handbook for Self-evaluation and Evaluation of Schools' Work* to promote school development planning and continuous school improvement through self-evaluation of all aspects of schools' work, including support for learning and pupil achievement, equity, school ethos, management, etc. This instrument has been piloted in over 100 primary and secondary schools (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 41). Self-evaluation involves relevant stakeholders, including teachers, school management, parents, local community representatives and local authorities, in discussing and selecting key aspects to be evaluated and developed. The handbook also out sets the criteria for assessing the levels of quality.

The Inclusive Education: From Practice to Policy project, sponsored by the Fund for an Open Society, involved a large number of NGOs, preschool institutions, and primary schools from 15 towns in Serbia. The project resulted in the *Guide for Advancing Inclusive Educational Practices*, which draws on the best national practices (Radivojević et al. 2009). A list of indicators of good IE practices, which again reflected both narrow and broader concepts of IE, drew on the analysis of over 300 selected examples.

An earlier instrument focusing specifically on improving IE is the *Index for Inclusion*, (Booth and Ainscow 2002), which was promoted and translated in Serbia by Save the Children-UK. Selected Serbian primary and secondary schools used it in developmental projects; teachers in this project rated the Index as being efficient and of high quality. School representatives, education advisers, and advisers from the IEEQ adapted the translated original for use in Serbia's primary and secondary schools. This process resulted in the *Handbook for Inclusive School Development* (Booth and Ainscow 2010); it complements the MoE and British Council (2005) *Handbook for Self-Evaluation*, because it focuses more specifically on aspects of inclusion.

Another project that supports school quality assurance (QA), called Development of Standards and Instruments for External Evaluation of the Quality of Education Institution Activity, is being implemented collaboratively by the IEEQ and the MoE, supported by the Netherlands schools inspectorate. It aims to develop a quality framework for external evaluation of schools' work by developing parallel standards for the same areas specified for school self-evaluation procedures. Education advisors involved in developing the framework have received specific teacher education and will transmit their knowledge to their colleagues (MoE 2009). After the standards and instruments were piloted in selected schools, the external evaluation system was adopted by the National Education Council in 2010 for implementation in the 2013–2014 school year.

Might three evaluation instruments be confusing to Serbian schools and even to educational advisers/evaluators, given their lack of prior experience with QA? Is the issue of inclusion given sufficient explicit prominence, other than in the *Index*? Despite this concern, in general, the instruments demonstrate that value is being attached to aspects of schools' work, such as collaboration and providing support for improving pupils' learning—aspects that offer hope for the future of a broader understanding and implementation of IE. It is also clear that, even before the LoF was enacted, the QA of schools' work was

assuming greater prominence from a variety of angles. This suggests the emergence in Serbia of a broad conceptualization of quality (and therefore inclusive) education.

What is missing, however, is any link from the underlying values and aims of these instruments to teacher education and its quality assurance. In the absence of commonly accepted teacher standards at the time of the ETF study (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 43) different criteria for the quality of work of teachers and institutions seem to have been developed independently from other components of quality assurance relevant to teacher development. This makes it impossible to systematically establish inclusive teaching practices as a non-negotiable criterion for every teacher's work.

Projects directly supporting teacher preparation and development

Support for teacher education for IE has come mainly through support for other inclusive developments at the school level. However, some projects have directly targeted teacher education at the faculty level. The faculties of teacher education in Sombor and Jagodina initiated a process of curriculum reform supported and financed by the government of Finland (2004–2006) in the Serbian Teacher Education Project (STEP). Curriculum reform in Jagodina was realized through action research that aimed at improving the competences of teacher educators, identified as a major issue in all Western Balkan countries (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 90). Although the curriculum reform did not specifically target teacher preparation for IE, the reforms, and therefore the increased competence of teacher educators, it did include issues that are valuable for quality inclusive teacher education. Examples are programmes providing more opportunities for trainee teachers to observe, and practice teaching, interdisciplinary approaches to planning and delivery, and new courses on child rights, developing tolerance, and working with children with SEN (Savović 2006). The Jagodina faculty continued with the reform via an EU TEMPUS project, Curriculum Reform in Teacher Education, from 2007 to 2009; it aims to improve student practice by preparing teachers and mentors to lead, monitor, and evaluate student practical placements (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 46).

International influence and financial support, teacher education, and practical help have contributed very significantly to the development of Serbian IE policies and practice. The broader conceptualization of IE has been most obvious in projects aimed at whole-school development and improved QA, although the success or otherwise of many of these projects cannot be fully evident for some years. The narrower conceptualization has been most evident in some earlier INGO projects that addressed teacher education for the mainstream education of specific groups of children. There, some messages may have been based in ideas about deficits and remediation rather than focused on potential; moreover, the implementation of supposed teacher learning was frequently not followed up. Plainly there are exceptions to this generalized criticism where group-specific course titles disguised broader content, as in programmes under the Common Action Plan for the Advancement of Roma Education in Serbia. Moreover, INGOs have left a valuable heritage: teachers who became engaged in IE through courses, many INGO/NGO publications that support and illuminate IE, many “model schools” with an ethical commitment to IE, and some better informed and more empowered parents.

Nonetheless, some narrowly-focussed programmes may also have inadvertently contributed to the further fragmentation of approaches to IE and therefore may have delayed its improved implementation. The claim that IE in Serbia is mostly understood in a narrow sense is also supported by an analysis of abstracts provided for a recent conference on inclusion in kindergarten and primary school offered by the Preschool Teacher Training

College in Sremska Mitrovica (2011). In the vast majority of abstracts dealing with IE, inclusion is defined as, or referred to as, working with children with SEN in mainstream schools.

Major challenges in developing teacher preparation for IE

In this section, we draw together some of the problems highlighted in earlier sections, to identify and discuss major challenges in developing teacher education for IE. We link each challenge to some suggestions for moving ahead.

The excessive elevation of “expertise” and “specialism”

It seems that the inherited fragmented systems for preparing teachers and other school staff and some of the narrowly focused project-based international assistance have combined to conceptualize teacher competence for inclusion as an “add-on” expertise rather than a non-negotiable integral duty for every teacher—simply part of being a “good teacher” for *all* children in that teacher’s class, regardless of other factors. We have already acknowledged the need for advisory teachers with highly specialist knowledge to support teachers in their work with a very small number of pupils with more complex needs for additional support. However, one of the persisting challenges to IE is the pervasive perception that IE *always* calls for specific expertise.

Throughout our Western Balkans research we found an undue reverence for and aspiration towards specialism, for real or apparent “expertise”, accompanied by a lack of belief in the potential of the “generalist” to cope with diverse classes, and sometimes a generalist’s lack of willingness even to try. Mainstream teachers seemed relieved to hand over most of their responsibility for students with SEN or Roma students to PAs or RTAs. While teacher educators sometimes taught about disabilities and specialist approaches, they very rarely drew student teachers’ attention to how so-called specialist approaches might actually be useful to a far wider range of students. Teacher educators make little attempt to enable teachers, and student teachers, to generalize from their learning; nor do the teachers themselves try to do so. Developing teacher educators in the competences that underpin IE would help reduce this culture of self-limitation and dependency.

Such issues will not disappear completely until teachers subsume the broad concept of IE into their regular teaching practice and expertise. Teachers should not be relieved of their responsibility for all their students, nor should they carry all the responsibility without some background support to ensure their pupils’ needs are met. As is true of other learning, teachers who take on new responsibilities may need some form of Vygotskian “scaffolding”, perhaps support from more experienced teachers, or further education that models inclusive strategies and the generalization of learning.

Teachers’ negative or uncertain dispositions towards IE

Early in this article we identified positive dispositions (attitudes) as the most important component of teacher competences for IE, suggesting that they should be all-embracing. A related challenge is fostering teachers’ motivation to adopt new ways that challenge their deeply held beliefs about education and the educability of their students. In Serbia, as in other Western Balkan countries, some teachers show outright hostility to including students with non-standard profiles, without recognizing that their behaviour is discriminatory, justifying

their views in ways that blame the victim. Thus, even if teacher development enabled teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills they need for IE, some teachers might still lack the necessary dispositions/attitudes to apply them in practice.

The regional report (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 64) identifies teachers' motivation to move towards social and educational inclusion as a major issue for the region but in Serbia it was identified more strongly than in some other countries. Morgan and Morris (1999) conducted substantial research in the UK, into teachers' and pupils' attributions for pupils' educational attainments; they found that pupils blamed their teachers' lack of effort for their academic failure while teachers blamed pupils and parents. The reality, the authors asserted, was that a mutually motivated partnership was best for learning but that teachers held greater responsibility within the relationship. Enthusiastic leadership of school principals and their active engagement in developing the school and its staff towards IE has been found effective, both in the region, as mentioned earlier, and by Riley and Louis (2000).

There are, however, ways in which teacher education can help teachers develop their understanding of IE and their attitudes towards it. We noted earlier that research in Serbia and elsewhere shows that prior practical experiences of diversity improve attitudes towards IE. In the Regional Report (Pantić et al. 2010, p. 92) a tougher stance was taken, suggesting that teachers themselves should experience the reality of social exclusion.

Another way to improve teacher competence and confidence for working inclusively is to promote generic skills, e.g., differentiation, individualization, genuine collaboration with assistants and parents, and varied ways of grouping students to optimize their learning (Bennett and Dunne 1992; Green 1999; Marvin 1998; Wannarka and Ruhl 2008). In other words, teachers should acquire a broad repertoire of ways to teach and to manage their classes, to bring into action their practical wisdom in order to ensure equity when responding to diversity (Florian 2008). The development of these generic fundamental competences should also take precedence, both in their timing (beginning early in programmes and continuing throughout them) and in the time allocated to them, over any more specialist competences. For IE to succeed, generically inclusive competences must be included just as much in subject methods for upper elementary and secondary teachers as in teacher education for first-level elementary school and kindergarten.

Lack of collaboration

Along with the elevation of specialism, IE faces another obstacle. Educational professionals in Serbia, and their institutional structures, constrain positive development in IE by a pervasive characteristic that could be called territorialism, lack of collaborative will, or separatism. We identified a lack of collaboration between the many faculties that provide pre-service education for teachers and other education professionals; we saw it again later, among INGOs delivering IE INSET, when collaboration could have brought shared understanding, the benefits of shared ideas, and economies of scale. This situation can be changed, especially by professionals who recognize the need to put children's rights and needs first, rather than considering their own comfort zone. A question should be asked: Should misplaced professional pride, redundant traditions, and the safeguarding of institutions' and organizations' individuality and autonomy take precedence over the well-being of professional education programmes and the greater educational and social inclusion of Serbia's children and young people?

Nonetheless, we see some encouraging developments. We noted that in the past graduates of medicine, law, engineering, economics, etc. became teachers without

undertaking any courses in subject didactics, pedagogy, or psychology. Article 8 of the LoF changed this. In response, an interdisciplinary master's programme with flexible pathways is being developed for student vocational teachers for the second cycle of elementary schools. A joint programme between the Faculty of Philosophy and other faculties of the University of Belgrade (2011), it takes cognisance of relevant teacher competences and equivalent courses in EU countries.

The Serbian country report noted recent efforts to support IE by changing the role of special schools and their staff so they become "mobile team members" supporting mainstream teachers, parents, and students in enabling quality mainstream inclusion (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 55), a development also paralleled in Kosovo (Rexhaj et al. 2010, p. 60). Other strategies could be effective in developing IE: build a more collaborative culture within schools by creating opportunities for teachers to exchange practical knowledge among themselves, and with staff of other schools, foster inter-school observational visits, establish systems of mentoring and peer-learning for teachers from several schools, and help them engage collaboratively in action research and projects.

The fragmented pre-service faculty-based system of teacher education remains the single most resistant barrier to the development of whole-school approaches to inclusive practices by all staff, despite the positive example offered by the University of Belgrade. The autonomy of higher education institutions makes this change one of the biggest challenges, and one rarely addressed by either policy makers or international assistance. Researchers have found several strategies that can lead to effective teacher education programmes: strongly integrate instruction about teaching and teaching practice (Frost, Durrant, Head, and Holden 2000; Fullan 1993); create interdisciplinary pro-inclusion teams (Miller and Stayton 2006, pp. 56–58); reflect critically on traditional conceptions of teachers' roles (Kidd, Sanchez, and Thorp 2008; OECD 2010; Tatto 1999); provide opportunities to gain community field experiences (Zeichner 2006); and build partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools, working with practitioners to continuously revise the curriculum and instruction of pre-service preparation (Pantić et al. 2010, pp. 148–150).

Lack of coherent quality assurance

Another pervasive challenge to developing quality teacher education for IE, now being partly addressed in Serbia, is building a coherent set of markers for quality teachers and teaching in the internal and external QA systems for different segments of the education system. Despite the positive initiatives mentioned above, which are building QA frameworks with inclusive practice as a criterion of quality teaching, their potential is not optimized because they lack mutual connections. Conspicuously absent is the collaboration and coordination that would ensure coherence between the different sets of standards and indicators being established, e.g., those for school evaluation and those for accreditation of teacher preparation programmes. The elephant in the Serbian drawing room that precludes coordination and sometimes overt criticism of its absence is the heavy politicization of educational debate and influence. A common strategy across Europe is identifying teacher competences as shared benchmarks for teachers, schools, inspections, and teacher education institutions. Reaching such a consensus between relevant players in Serbia could be an extremely significant step, both towards improving teacher quality—given adequate support for developing the necessary competences—and putting inclusive education higher on the teacher education agenda.

Conclusions

Teacher development plays a crucial role as part of the complex mechanisms of teachers' change, not just to ensure that student teachers and teachers acquire the competences for social and educational inclusion, but also to inspire teachers to be lifelong learners for whom change is not a threat. This requires concerted effort from all relevant players: teacher educators, evaluators, policy makers, and teachers themselves. Policy makers may also enhance teachers' employment and working conditions by creating and supporting systems of adequate monitoring and reward for professional development. Progress in inclusive practice should not only bring material rewards, but also result in career progression.

We used the case of Serbia to illustrate how the conceptions of IE underlying various internationally assisted projects that have an impact on teacher development are interacting with enduring inherited traditions in schools and teacher education, and how, intentionally or otherwise, they help shape change in policies and practices. The identified challenges are relevant for other countries in the region that share some of their common inheritance and aspirations. We have attempted to illustrate some similarities but also some differences.

Much of the international assistance to education has focused on the groups whose rights *to* and *in* education have been neglected in the past. The recent changes in education legislation and other strategies have made these disenfranchised populations visible. They send a clear message to the general population as well as to education institutions and professionals: certain groups need additional attention and support, and the state is willing to struggle to provide them their rights.

However, implementing legislation and policies is not a simple process; it is also a product of struggles and contradictions. We have argued that the justified upholding of the education rights of specific, particularly vulnerable populations seems to have had an inadvertent impact on the perceptions of teacher competence for IE in ways that can be counterproductive in changing practice; they can even result in further overt or covert stigmatizing of these very groups. The widespread narrow conceptualization of teacher competence for IE as a kind of specialized expertise for dealing with "non-standard" pupils has resulted in significant resentment and resistance in teachers. Teachers' responses in the ETF study indicate that many teachers will be challenged to move from being teachers of average pupils to being teachers of *all* pupils.

We described international initiatives and national regulations that aim to enhance quality education for all and that are in the process of implementation. It is, however, too early to say what effects these efforts and developments are having, since external evaluations are still insufficient. We suggest that international support is best used to make schools genuinely more comprehensively inclusive rather than to treat inclusion as a mere addition to what schools are supposedly already doing. Teachers need sufficient time to understand the innovations, to reconsider and adjust the values on which their teaching is based, and to make appropriate practices their own. Pre-service teacher education and CPD planners must recognize that for teachers to make the transition from traditional to more complex contemporary roles, they will need additional learning and research; this, in turn, requires resources, books, and other teachers from which they can learn experientially, to see for themselves "how IE works". Research suggests that teachers would work towards their new roles more willingly in teams, as part of a learning community (Stoll and Louis 2007).

We conclude that, among other factors, the narrow conceptualization of IE has led to ineffective teacher preparation for IE in the already fragmented teacher education systems in Serbia. Thus a broader consensual and more comprehensive conceptualization of

inclusive education would contribute significantly to teacher education for IE and thereby to more socially and educationally inclusive practices in schools.

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Alison Closs (United Kingdom) is an independent educational consultant with particular interests in inclusive education, the rights of potentially marginalized children and young people in education, and inclusive classroom methods. She was formerly senior lecturer in inclusive and special education at the University of Edinburgh. She has studied the education of children with medical conditions and the school experiences of refugee/asylum-seeker children and their families in Scotland, among other topics. She has also worked extensively in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans as a researcher and project evaluator, most recently as an EU expert on the ETF project described in this article.